

**Rosemary Timperley**  
*Christmas Meeting* (1952)

**Fortunately enough two types of ghosts can be found. Some are horrible and deadly like E.A. Poe's Red Death, but some are blue eyed and kind, yet... with a surprise at hand!**

Rosemary Timperley (1920-1988) is an English author of novels and short stories which explore different aspects of the supernatural. Her most acclaimed novels are *The Summer Visitors* (1971) and *Inside* (1988) and five volumes she edited in a series of ghost story anthologies.

### *Christmas Meeting*

I have never spent Christmas alone before.

It gives me an **uncanny** feeling, sitting alone in my "furnished room", with my head full of ghosts, and the room full of voices of the past. It's a **drowning** feeling – all the Christmases of the past coming back in a **mud jumble**: the childish Christmas with a house full of relations, a tree in the window, sixpences in the pudding, and the delicious, **crinkly** stocking in the dark morning; the adolescent Christmas, with mother and father, the war and the bitter cold, and the letters from abroad; the first really grown-up Christmas, with mother and father, the war and the bitter cold, and the letters from abroad; the first really grown up Christmas, with a lover – the snow and the enchantment, red wine and kisses, and the walk in the dark before midnight, with the ground so white and the stars diamond bright in the black sky - so many Christmases through the year.

And, now, the first Christmas alone.

But not quite loneliness. A feeling of companionship with all the other people who are spending Christmas alone, millions of them – past and present. A feeling that, if I close my eyes, there will be no past or future, only an endless present which *is* time, because it is all we ever have.

Yes, however cynical you are, however irreligious, it makes you feel queer to be alone at Christmas time.

So I am absurdly relieved when the young man walks in. There is nothing romantic about it – I am a woman of nearly fifty, a spinster schoolma'am, with **grim**, dark hair, and myopic eyes that once were beautiful, and he's a kid of twenty, rather unconventionally dressed with a **flowing** wine-coloured tie and black velvet jacket, and brown curls which could do with a taste of the barber scissors. The **effeminacy** of his dresses is belied by his features – narrow **piercing** blue eyes and arrogant, **jutting** nose and chin. Not that he looks strong. The skin is fine drawn over the prominent features and he is very white.

He **burst** in without knocking, then pauses, says :

"I am so sorry. I thought this was my room." He begins to go out, then hesitates and says: "Are you alone?" "Yes".

"It's—**queer**, being alone at Christmas, isn't it? May I stay and talk?"

"I'd be glad if you would"

He comes right in and sits down by the fire. "I hope you don't think I came in here on purpose. I really did think it was my room", he explains.

"I am glad you made the mistake. But you are a very young person to be alone at Christmas time."

"I wouldn't go back to the country to my family. It would **hold up** my work. I am a writer."

"I see." I can't help smiling a little. That explains his rather unusual dress. And he takes himself so seriously, this young man!

"Of course, you mustn't waste a precious moment of writing." I say with a **twinkle**.

"No, not a moment! That's what my family won't see. They don't appreciate urgency."

"Families are never appreciative of the artistic nature."

"No they aren't" he agrees seriously

“What are you writing?” “Poetry and a diary combined. It’s called *My poems and I*, by Francis Randel. That’s my name. My family say there’s no point in my writing, that I’m too young. But I don’t feel young. Sometimes I feel like an old man, with too much to do before he dies.”

“Revolving faster and faster on the wheel of creativeness.”

“Yes! Yes, exactly! You understand! You must read my work sometime. Please read my work! Read my work!”

A note of desperation in his voice, a look of fear in his eyes makes me say: “We are both getting much too solemn for Christmas day. I am going to make you some coffee. And I have a plum cake.” I move about, clattering cups, spooning coffee into my percolator. But I must have offended him, for, when I look around, I find he has left me. I am absurdly disappointed. I finish making coffee, however, then turn to the bookshelf in the room. It is piled high with volumes, for which the landlady has apologized profusely: “Hope you don’t mind the books, miss, but my husband won’t part with them and there is nowhere else to put them. We charge a bit less for the room for that reason.”

“I don’t mind” I said. “Books are good friends.”

But these aren’t very friendly-looking books. I take one **at random**. Or does some strange fate guide my hand?

Sipping my coffee, inhaling my cigarette smoke, I begin to read the **battered** little book, published, I see, in Spring, 1852. It’s mainly poetry – immature **stuff**, but vivid. Then there is a kind of diary. More realistic, less affected. Out of curiosity if there are any amusing comparisons, I turn to the entry for Christmas Day 1851. I read: “My first Christmas day alone. I had rather an odd experience. When I went back to my **lodgings** after a walk, there was a middle-aged woman in my room. I thought at first, I’d walked into the wrong room, but this was not so, and later, after a pleasant talk, she – disappeared. I suppose she was a ghost. But I wasn’t frightened. I liked her. But I don’t feel well tonight. Not at all well. I have never felt ill at Christmas before.”

A publisher’s note followed the last entry:

FRANCIS RANDEL DIED FROM A SUDDEN HEART ATTACK ON THE NIGHT OF CHRISTMAS DAY 1851. THE WOMAN MENTIONED IN THIS FINAL ENTRY IN HIS DIARY WAS THE LAST PERSON TO SEE HIM ALIVE. IN SPITE OF REQUEST FOR HER TO COME FORWARD, SHE NEVER DID SO. HER IDENTITY REMAINS A MYSTERY.

## Notes

uncanny: mysterious

drowning: obscure

mud jumble: dirty mess

crinkly: falling down

grim: gloomy

flowing: elegant

effeminacy: quite feminine

piercing: penetrating

jut: prominent

burst: came

queer: curious

hold up: go on with

twinkle: flash of the eyes

at random: casually

battered: shabby, ruined

stuff: material

lodgings: house, flat

**Ex. 1**

**Put into the right order the following sequences**

- a. Christmas alone
- b. The wrong room
- c. A young man walks in
- d. Description of the young man
- e. He was dead
- f. He has left
- g. He is a writer and asks her to read his poems
- h. She prepares some coffee
- i. Thinking about past Christmas
- j. She reads a collection of poems.

**Ex. 2.**

Rosemary Timperley (1920-1988) .....over sixty novels and hundreds of short stories. She was .....in London and sold her first short story .....Illustrated magazine in 1946. She began her freelance writing career .....1960 after working as a .....teacher and journalist. Among her most famous tales are the classic ghost stories *The Mistress in Black* (1969) and *Christmas Meeting* (1952). Although principally a mainstream writer, Timperley wrote a large ....of short stories that explored different aspects of.... supernatural. She was .....known for editing five volumes in a series of ghost story anthologies. She also wrote mystery, romance, horror and suspense fiction and received critical praise .....her many novels, .....include *The Summer Visitors* (1971) .....*Inside* (1988).

Many different anthologies have collected .....works, including Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories (1983) and the horror story collection Return From the Grave (1976). Timperley .....wrote a number of applauded radio and television .....that were broadcast ....a variety of shows in England. Her short story "Harry" (1955) has been adapted to film several times.

**Ex. 3**

**Find the words in addition**

The story is about an old woman who **she** is alone on Christmas night, 185. She is quite sad and starts thinking about her past Christmas with **the** her family. Suddenly a young man enters her room. He is a boy **of** twenty years old, unconventionally dressed. His hair is brown and he looks quite **rather** effeminate. He has **a** narrow intense blue eyes and arrogant nose and chin. He is very pale. He says he is sorry because he thought it was his room. They start **to** speaking. The boy tells the old woman he is a writer, but his family does not approve his work and he doesn't **not** want to go back and spends Christmas with them. He asks **to** her to read his poems. She says not to be too serious on Christmas day and offers him a cup of coffee. But when she goes back to the sitting room she finds he has left **away**. Disappointed, she takes a book from her library. It is a collection of poems and some pages of a diary. One when of them **it** told about the meeting of a young poet and an old woman at **on** Christmas. The young man had died just on that day and the old woman had **been** disappeared. It was the year 1851.

**Ex. 4**

- a. The last time I spent Christmas alone was ten years ago  
For  
I .....10 years.
- b. She has never not read a book of poems since when she went to school

- last  
she .....when she went to school.
- c. When I came back I found he left me  
had  
when I came back I ..... away
- d. I have never spent Christmas alone  
First time  
It was .....alone
- e. I have already read this book  
years ago  
I .....years ago

### Ex. 5. Written exercises

Write a letter about a Christmas day you remember in your childhood.

Follow the suggestions below

at home; parents and grandparent; dinner; roasted duck; Christmas plum cake; friends arrive; presents for children; Christmas tree, Father Christmas .

### Ex. 6. Oral exercises

Speak about a horror movie you saw at the week-end

Follow the suggestions below

You are with a friend and you tell him about the thriller you saw.

**Say**

- The title of the film
- The director of the film
- The actors playing in the film
- The plot
- Say if you liked it or not
- Say what you liked and what you did not like
- Suggest your friend to go or not to go

**Ex 7 - Listening:** greedy man, he was cold, warn him, three ghost, tell him he was wrong ,tomb, respect and help everybody

### Listening

An old man called Ebenezer Scrooge, was very avaricious and did not love Christams. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, trembled in his office because Scrooge did not spend money for a fire and he does not give money for the poor.

One night he receives the frightening visitation from the ghost of his dead partner, Jacob Marley. Marley, tells Scrooge that he was punished for his self-serving life his spirit and must wander about with heavy chains. He also informs Scrooge that three spirits will visit him during each of the next three nights and then disappears.

The first ghost who visits scrooge is the Ghost of Christmas Past, a child with a shining head. The spirit makes scrooge revisit his childhood school days, his first job, and his engagement to Belle, a woman who leaves Scrooge he prefers money to her. On the second night appears the Ghost of Christmas Present, a giant dressed in a green fur coat. He takes Scrooge through London and shows him the Cratchit family preparing feast. Scrooge discovers Bob Cratchit has a very ill son, Tiny Tim. Then a hooded figure comes towards Scrooge: it is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. He shows Scrooge some scenes about an unnamed man's recent death. Scrooge wants to know the

name of the dead man and the ghost points to a lonely, deserted grave where it is written his own name. Scrooge desperately implores the spirit to alter his fate, but the spirit disappears. From that moment on Scrooge thinks to redeem himself: he sends an enormous Christmas turkey to the Cratchit house, goes to his nephew's party, and provides generous presents for the poor.

**Choose the right alternative**

- a. Scrooge was a very
  - greedy man
  - famous man
  - a self confident man
- b. Bob Cratchit was trembling because he was
  - afraid of Scrooge
  - guilty of theft
  - he was cold
- c. Bob Marley's ghost appeared to Scrooge to
  - menace him
  - warn him
  - to frighten him
- d. Scrooge was visited by
  - three ghost
  - three witches
  - three fairies
- e. They showed him three moment of his life to
  - tell him to go on living like that
  - trick him
  - tell him he was wrong
- f. The last spirit showed him his
  - tomb
  - future job
  - future Christmas
- g. The lesson Scrooge learnt was to
  - respect and help everybody
  - be generous and get rewards
  - carry on his life

**KEYS**

**Ex. 1**

- a. Christmas alone
- b. Thinking about past Christmas
- c. A young man walks in
- d. Description of the young man
- e. The wrong room He is a writer and asks her to read his poems
- f. She prepares some coffee
- g. He has left
- h. She reads a collection of poems.
- i. He was dead

**Ex. 2:** Wrote, born, to, in, school, number, the, well, for, which, and, her, also, scripts, on

**Ex. 3:** She, the, of, rather, a, to, not, to, away, It, on, been

**Ex. 4**

- a. The last time I spent Christmas alone was ten years ago  
 For  
 I ..... 10 years.
- b. She has never not read a book of poems since when she went to school  
 last  
 she .....when she went to school.

- c. When I came back I found he left me  
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**Say**

- The title of the film:
- The director of the film
- The actors playing in the film
- The plot : a man has escaped from prison. He menaces the family of the lawyer who sent him to prison
- Say if you liked it or not
- Say what you liked and what you did not like
- Suggest your friend to go or not to go